Promoting international learning outcomes during a study abroad: the moderating role of internationalisation at home

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Abstract

Purpose – The authors examine the role of internationalisation at-home activities and an international classroom at a home institution to promote intercultural competence development during a study abroad.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors use large scale longitudinal data from the global mind monitor (GMM) (2018–2020) to examine change over time in both multicultural personality (MPQ) and cultural knowledge (CQ) among students in Dutch higher education institutions. The authors analyse the moderating effect of the preparation in the home institution by looking at the added value of both intercultural communication courses and international classroom setting for intercultural competence development during a study abroad.

Findings – The results show that particularly courses on intercultural communication significantly promote intercultural competence development during a stay abroad. Frequent interactions with international staff also seem to be beneficial for this development.

Research limitations/implications – This study was conducted in the Netherlands, in one of the most internationalised educational systems in the world. Therefore, it is difficult to generalise these findings to other contexts before any further empirical research is conducted.

Practical implications – Based on the findings, the authors formulate practical advice for higher education institutions that aim to get the most out of the international learning outcomes of a study abroad.

Originality/value – This paper is the first to assess the moderating effect of preparatory internationalisation at home initiatives on the intercultural learning effects of international experiences later on in a study program. Other studies have proposed that these effects will exist but have not tested them empirically with longitudinal data.

Keywords Intercultural competence, Internationalisation at home, International classroom, Multicultural personality, Cultural knowledge, Global mind monitor

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction
Higher education institutes (HEIs) increasingly consider international and intercultural competences as 21st-century skills that should be incorporated in learning outcomes (Van der
Werf, 2017). To promote these international learning outcomes, HEIs can offer internationalisation activities both at home and abroad. Although the scholarly interest in internationalisation at home increased in the last years (Beelen and Jones, 2015), student outgoing mobility is still the most common internationalisation strategy used in higher education (Gregersen-Hermans, 2016). The pursuit of this strategy was boosted further by the European Commission, which has expressed its ambition of doubling the participation in Erasmus+ by 2025 (European Commission, 2018).

Though widespread as an intervention, cultural immersion in a foreign country may not be sufficient to effectively enhance intercultural competences (Kruse and Brubaker, 2007). Without specific preparation at home and guidance during and after the study abroad (study exchange or internship), it may be less transformative than originally anticipated or even counterproductive (Jackson, 2015; Paige and Vande Berg, 2012; Salisbury et al., 2013). In fact, internationalisation at home — “the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments” (Beelen and Jones, 2015, p. 69) — is framed as essential for HEIs who want to ensure that a study abroad experience effectively enhances intercultural competences (Kruse and Brubaker, 2007; Pedersen, 2010). Therefore, institutional researchers in higher education explicitly advise HEIs to invest in the development of pre-departure and post-departure programs (Deardorff, 2006; Root and Ngampornchai, 2013). In this study, therefore, we focus on the impact of pre-departure IaH initiatives on intercultural competence development during a study abroad (Root and Ngampornchai, 2013; Popov et al., 2017).

Reviewing the literature, we notice a lack of empirical evidence on what a preparatory IaH program should entail in order to optimise the achievement of international learning outcomes during the study abroad. Root and Ngampornchai (2013) recommend that IaH should at least incorporate elements of personal awareness, critical reflection, verbal and non-verbal communication. Dunlap and Mapp (2017) point out the importance of developing knowledge of the profession in the destination country and the practical aspects of international travel and living abroad. Other authors suggest designing curricula based on an international pedagogy with international examples, case studies and guided reflection and intercultural coaching (Pedersen, 2010; Popov et al., 2017). Some authors also stress the critical role of academic staff in the successful achievement of international learning outcomes (Beelen and Jones, 2015). However, these studies cannot directly connect their design suggestions to effective international learning outcomes in the long run. Therefore, it is necessary to further disentangle which specific IaH activities most effectively promote the further development of intercultural competences during and after a study stay abroad.

We aim to address this gap by investigating the moderating effect of participating in different preparatory IaH initiatives on the achievement of international learning outcomes during a study abroad using large-scale survey data. We focus on the most common IaH initiatives that institutions take to optimise the learning outcomes for individual students (Beelen and Jones, 2015): classes on intercultural communication, events with a focus on internationalisation, such as international project weeks, and the presence of international staff and students, the so-called “international classroom”. In our assessment of international learning outcomes, we make use of the global mind monitor (GMM), a quantitative measurement instrument specifically developed to assess intercultural competence development over time (Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, 2018). This tool contains two validated measurement scales that are widely considered to predict effectiveness in international and intercultural contexts (a.o. Matsumoto and Hwang, 2013; Schnabel et al., 2015; Wolf and Borzikowsky, 2018): The cultural intelligence scale (CQ) (Ang et al., 2007) and the multicultural personality scale (MPQ) (Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, 2000).
In summary, the research question we aim to answer is “To what extent do four different types of IaH activities enhance the development of cultural intelligence and multicultural personality during a study abroad?”

2. Literature

2.1 The impact of a study abroad on intercultural competence development

A study stay abroad is generally considered to have a positive transformational effect on students’ intercultural competence development (Gregersen-Hermans, 2016). Some examples of empirical studies demonstrating such an effect are Marcotte et al. (2007), who report effects on cultural awareness and Crossman and Clark (2010), who found positive effects on outcomes such as language acquisition and the development of soft skills related to cultural understandings, personal characteristics and ways of thinking. Several authors report a direct impact of international study sojourns on dimensions of cultural intelligence and multicultural personality, such as knowledge and adaptability (Boonen et al., 2018; Brown, 2009; Engle and Crowne, 2014; Leong, 2007). However, there is also some empirical evidence that a study stay abroad may not be as transformative as suggested and that effects are less straightforward than previously assumed (Schartner, 2016). For example, Salisbury et al. (2013) find that a study stay abroad increases a student’s diversity of contact but has little influence on a student’s relativistic appreciation of cultural differences or comfort with these differences. Other studies show that students return home more ethnocentric and less willing to interact with people who have a different linguistic and cultural background, slip back into familiar routines, and “shoe-box” their international learning (Jackson, 2015). These conflicting findings highlight the necessity for research into the contingencies of intercultural competence development during a study stay abroad. Furthermore, it is important to consider the possibility that the effects of internationalisation initiatives may be stronger for some dimensions of intercultural competence than for others. In the remainder of this section, we will first present our conceptualisation of the intercultural competence construct. Then, we will focus on different IaH activities and their potential effects on intercultural competence development during a study stay abroad.

2.2 Dimensions of intercultural competence

In this study, intercultural competence is conceptualised as a heterogeneous construct involving multiple sub competences that are necessary to interact with people from other cultures adequately and effectively (Schnabel et al., 2015). This conceptualisation is inspired by Deardorff’s model on intercultural competence development (Deardorff, 2011). In this model, the development of attitudes, knowledge and skills lead towards an internal outcome of adaptability, openness and initiative. These, in turn, lead to an external outcome defined as “effective and appropriate behaviour in intercultural situations” (Deardorff, 2006). This model also provided the theoretical basis for the dependent variables in the current study, namely (1) cultural intelligence, consisting of attitude, (meta) knowledge and behaviour (Ang et al., 2007) and (2) Multicultural personality (Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, 2000). These two constructs both measure separate key elements in intercultural competence assessment and are, therefore, combined as complementary constructs in this study. Cultural intelligence mostly tackles cognitive components, focusing on cultural knowledge, while the multicultural personality questionnaire (MPQ) measures the key personality traits of the desired internal outcome in Deardorff’s Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (2006).

Cultural intelligence (CQ) contains four factors (Ang and Van Dyne, 2015): cognitive cultural intelligence, metacognitive cultural intelligence, motivational cultural intelligence and behavioural cultural intelligence. Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven’s (2000) Multicultural personality questionnaire (MPQ) measures five personality traits related to multicultural effectiveness: emotional stability, open-mindedness, cultural empathy, flexibility and social initiative.
2.3 The role of preparatory at home initiatives

“Defining study abroad as a process, rather than an event implies that preparation should begin much earlier than the departure and that students should be supported after their return” (Kruse and Brubaker, 2007, p. 147). Intercultural learning is not something that automatically occurs because of the study abroad, as cross-cultural contact does not necessarily lead to intercultural learning (Gregersen-Hermans, 2016). Some authors suggest that the preparation at the home institution may leverage the students’ development during stay abroad programs (a.o. Root and Ngampornchai, 2013; Popov et al., 2017). To effectively facilitate and optimise the students’ learning process, HEIs are, therefore, advised to take preparatory measures to make sure students are aware of the potential impact of intercultural encounters and to help them in transferring day-to-day experiences into competences (Deardorff, 2006; Root and Ngampornchai, 2013). Although these initiatives are believed to be important, Paige and Goode (2009) indicate that this type of intervention in many institutions is “uneven at best or often non-existent” (p. 334).

Moreover, there is limited empirical evidence for the effectiveness of such interventions. To support HEIs in optimising the intercultural learning process for their students, it is important to gain more insight into which activities help students “learn how to learn” about culture. In their study “Making the Most of Study Abroad”, Kruse and Brubaker (2007) make a number of practical recommendations to optimally prepare students for the international experience. First of all, it is important that preparation does not only focus on practicalities (logistics, visa, housing, study program, etc.). In their view, effective preparation requires a mix of intercultural communication theory and practical exercises (a simulation or role play, a cultural analogy such as the iceberg, a self-assessment, etc.), combined with ethnographic and observational assignments during the study abroad (Kruse and Brubaker, 2007). Such preparatory activities in the home institution are focused on reflection and awareness, and the authors expect them to positively affect “culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills and attitudes” (Kruse and Brubaker, 2007, p. 148). Following their line of reasoning, we expect that intercultural communication courses will mostly affect cultural intelligence, as they are mostly aimed at “applying and expending cultural knowledge and skills” (Kruse and Brubaker, 2007, p. 149) and creating awareness of cultural diversity (Wolf and Borzikowsky, 2018). We analyse the effectiveness of these courses in two variations: (1) a formal intercultural communication course and (2) a shorter and more informal training during an international project day, week or conference. Regarding the effect of these courses, we propose the following hypothesis, in which we compare students who take part in a certain initiative to students who do not:

H1. Cultural Intelligence Hypothesis:
The development of cultural intelligence (CQ) during a stay abroad is stronger for students who have (a) taken an intercultural communication course or (b) participated in an international project week prior to departure, compared to students who have not.

2.4 The international classroom

Next to formal learning activities, diversifying student and staff populations at home is also expected to have an effect on intercultural competence development (Gregersen-Hermans, 2016). For example, a large-scale empirical analysis of 12,000 American students shows that interacting with international students and developing friendships with them affects “the ability to appreciate cultural and global diversity” and “being comfortable with working with people from other cultures” (Soria and Troisi, 2014). Therefore, we expect that these earlier experiences of “practicing” intercultural interactions with international peers and lecturers at home may also lower the threshold and trigger the development of personality traits that are part of Deardorff’s “desired internal outcomes”, such as adaptability to different communication styles, flexibility and cultural empathy. In that respect, we expect that earlier experiences with adapting to different communication styles mostly trigger personal
development rather than the development of cultural knowledge. That is why we expect that the presence of international students and staff will mainly affect student’s MPQ rather than CQ development and propose the following hypothesis:

**H2. Multicultural personality hypothesis**

The development of *multicultural personality* (MPQ) during a study abroad is stronger for students who attended classes prior to departure which (a) leveraged the presence of international students or (b) were taught by international staff members, compared to students who did not attend such classes.

### 3. Data and methods

The two hypothesis outlined above were tested using a survey design in which students completed a multi-construct questionnaire twice: once before their study abroad (pre-measure) and once after their return (post-measure).

#### 3.1 Participants and procedure

The sample consisted of 1,660 students who studied abroad during one semester in the academic years 2017–2018, 2018–2019 or 2019–2020. The data were collected in three different HEIs in the Netherlands: Hotelschool The Hague, Stenden University of Applied Sciences and Zuyd University of Applied Sciences (see Table 1 for a full overview of the sample characteristics). All participating institutes had informed the authors that they offer the four IaH activities included in this study. All participating students took part in the first online measure shortly before leaving for a study abroad and in the second measure shortly before arriving back in the Netherlands.

#### 3.2 Instrumentation

The questionnaire contained measurement scales (1–7) for the 9 different MPQ and CQ dimensions discussed earlier. In Table 2 below, we present a summary of the reliability indicators of the latent constructs. We used Principal Component Analysis (PCA) for dimension reduction. The analyses show that the nine theoretical constructs can be considered reliable and one-dimensional with our data, with Cronbach’s alpha scores ranging from 0.67 to 0.87.

To measure participation in preparatory IaH initiatives (our moderating variable), students were asked to indicate (1) whether they participated (yes/no) in a course in

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>528</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,130</td>
<td>68.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hotelschool The Hague</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stenden University of Applied Sciences</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>24.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zuyd University of Applied Sciences</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>48.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>1,221</td>
<td>73.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>26.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Previously had study experience abroad</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>711</td>
<td>42.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>57.2</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>1,660</td>
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Table 1. Descriptive information panel data – June 2020
4. Analysis and results

4.1 Descriptive trends in change over time
First, we explore the general descriptive trends of change on the nine dimensions. Table 3 shows the average mean scores (1–7) before (T1) and after (T2) the study abroad. For all dimensions, we observed small differences between both measurements in the expected direction. Students’ scores on all but one dimension (flexibility) significantly increased over time (see scores for paired samples t-tests). The increase in these average scores was larger in the cultural intelligence dimensions.

4.2 Examining the effects of internationalisation at home
Next, we analysed the potential effect of the four different IaH initiatives listed above on students’ development over time. The first IaH initiative was a specific class on intercultural/cross-cultural communication, (2) whether they were provided (yes/no) with international days, weeks, or conferences outside of the classroom, (3) whether learning methods made use of the presence of international students (yes/no) and (4) whether they attended classes (yes/no) given by international staff members with international experience.
communication (71.0% of the sample at T2). A second initiative was the organisation of more informal opportunities to learn about other cultures during international days, weeks or conferences (67.7% of the sample at T2). The third element of IaH was the presence of international students (71.3% of the sample at T2), and the fourth element under investigation was the presence of international staff members (84.6% of the sample at T2). What is interesting to note regarding these four variables is that they rarely occurred in isolation. Most students indicated that their pre-departure program included multiple elements. Only 11% of the students indicated that only one of these four IaH elements applied to their situation. This means there was considerable overlap between the different initiatives and that it was necessary to assess them together in one model to identify their effects on intercultural competence development. However, all combinations between the initiatives were represented in the student sample, and there was no IaH initiative that entirely overlapped with another. Collinearity statistics did not show any problems in this regard in the analyses.

We use nine lagged dependent variable regression models in which we estimated the moderating effect of these four different initiatives on change in the different dimensions of cultural intelligence (CQ) and multicultural personality (MPQ) and over time. A lagged dependent variable model is a rather conservative estimation that allowed us to analyse the effect of a number of independent variables on change in the dependent variable by including the T1 measure as an independent variable (Keele and Kelly, 2005).

4.3 Results: the effects of preparation at home on change over time
The results are presented in Tables 4 and 5 below. First, looking at change over time, we should note that the individual MPQ personality scores seemed to be more stable over time, as became clear from the stability coefficients (dependent variable score at T1) and the related explained variance ($R^2$) coefficients. This was also already visible in the small aggregate differences presented in Table 3. This stronger stability is not surprising, as these are traits that are generally considered to be less malleable (Wolf and Borzikowski, 2018). For cultural knowledge, the stability coefficients were weaker, suggesting that there seems to be more room for progress in cultural intelligence (CQ) than in personality (MPQ) during a study abroad experience.

Regarding our two hypotheses, we identified a number of relevant findings. First of all, we found that students who participated in an intercultural communication course at their home institution developed their cultural knowledge more strongly during a study abroad than students who did not participate in such a course, providing support for our first hypothesis. This was particularly the case for the two cognitive dimensions: cognitive, cultural intelligence and meta-cognitive cultural intelligence. We observed a weakly significant but positive effect on change in motivational cultural intelligence, but no significant effect in behavioural cultural intelligence. Remarkably, we also found a positive effect of participating in an ICC course on the increase in three multicultural personality dimensions: cultural empathy, open-mindedness and social initiative. Apart from participation in an ICC course, we did not observe any additional significant effects of participation in other internationalisation activities in the curriculum.

Our second hypothesis states that students would benefit from frequent interactions with international staff and students at the home institution, to further develop their multicultural personality during a stay abroad. We did not find support for this hypothesis. Results are mixed and, to some extent, counterintuitive. We did, however, observe a positive effect of frequent interactions with international staff on cognitive development during the study abroad (cognitive, cultural intelligence and meta-cognitive cultural intelligence). This indicates that internationalisation at home seems to mostly affect progress in the specific cognitive components that we measured. Regarding the multicultural personality dimensions, however, we did not find the expected positive effect of earlier interactions with international staff and students on MPQ development. On the contrary, we found a
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cultural empathy</th>
<th>Multicultural personality (MPQ) dimensions</th>
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<td>B (SE)</td>
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<td>B (SE)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dependent variable score at T1 (lagged dv)</td>
<td>0.681*** (0.019)</td>
<td>0.671*** (0.019)</td>
<td>0.723*** (0.018)</td>
<td>0.726*** (0.017)</td>
<td>0.788*** (0.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internationalisation at home</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>ICC course</td>
<td>0.047* (0.023)</td>
<td>0.118*** (0.034)</td>
<td>0.051 ns (0.040)</td>
<td>0.005 ns (0.034)</td>
<td>0.082** (0.027)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International project (e.g. int. week)</td>
<td>0.010 ns (0.022)</td>
<td>0.039 ns (0.033)</td>
<td>0.050 ns (0.039)</td>
<td>0.031 ns (0.033)</td>
<td>0.012 ns (0.026)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International students</td>
<td>0.000 ns (0.024)</td>
<td>-0.025 ns (0.036)</td>
<td>-0.045 ns (-0.042)</td>
<td>-0.089** (0.035)</td>
<td>0.008 ns (0.028)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>International staff</strong></td>
<td>-0.013 ns (0.029)</td>
<td>0.037 ns (0.043)</td>
<td>-0.081 ns (-0.051)</td>
<td>-0.146** (0.043)</td>
<td>-0.012 ns (0.034)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Control variables</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender (female = 1)</td>
<td>0.080*** (0.022)</td>
<td>0.109*** (0.032)</td>
<td>-0.003 ns (0.038)</td>
<td>-0.074* (0.032)</td>
<td>0.013 ns (0.025)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch nationality (yes = 1)</td>
<td>0.032 ns (0.026)</td>
<td>-0.024 ns (0.036)</td>
<td>0.066 ns (0.042)</td>
<td>0.159*** (0.036)</td>
<td>0.132*** (0.028)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Previously stayed abroad (yes = 1)</td>
<td>0.042* (0.020)</td>
<td>0.095*** (0.031)</td>
<td>0.028 ns (0.036)</td>
<td>0.035 ns (0.030)</td>
<td>0.026 ns (0.024)</td>
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<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.465</td>
<td>0.490</td>
<td>0.487</td>
<td>0.569</td>
<td>0.636</td>
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<td>$N$</td>
<td>1,659</td>
<td>1,659</td>
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**Note(s):** Entries are $B$-coefficients and their standard errors of a series of linear regression models, including the lagged dependent variable at $T_1$. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$
rather surprising negative effect of interactions with staff and students on the development of emotional stability during the study abroad.

Finally, we would like to point out an interesting pattern regarding the control variables in the models. Students who had already had a previous experience abroad (43% of the sample) still seemed to benefit from this experience for their further intercultural development, particularly regarding the 4 cultural knowledge dimensions. We observed positive, significant effects of a previous stay abroad (yes) on all 4 dimensions.

5. Conclusion and limitations

5.1 Conclusion

First and foremost, the results of this study show that a study stay abroad generally has a positive effect on students’ intercultural competence development, even without taking into account the pre-departure internationalisation activities that were organised at home. What we do see in our analysis, however, is that preparation at home can effectively boost this learning curve, particularly regarding the cognitive and attitudinal dimensions of cultural intelligence and the multicultural personality dimensions empathy, open-mindedness and social initiative. In that sense, our results provide empirical evidence for the earlier pedagogical recommendations outlined by Kruse and Brubaker (2007), Root and Ngampornchai (2013), Popov et al. (2017) and Dunlap and Mapp (2017), who underline the importance of at home preparation for international learning. At-home initiatives indeed enhance further development of international learning, yet there are some notable differences between the effectiveness of different initiatives.

Pre-departure intercultural communication courses mostly enhance the development of the cultural knowledge and attitudinal components during the study abroad, partially confirming our first hypothesis (H1). Informal learning during international project days,
weeks or conferences, however, did not have an additional effect on cognitive development during the study abroad. The reason for this could be that such activities are shorter in duration compared to full courses and, therefore, have less impact.

Additionally, pre-departure intercultural communication courses enhance the development of cultural empathy, open-mindedness and social initiative during the study abroad. Although we did not specifically hypothesise this, it did not come as a complete surprise. Gaining knowledge about mechanisms of interactions with people from different backgrounds prior to departure may increase openness towards and understanding of people that are encountered abroad. Moreover, it may boost students' confidence to take the first step in approaching people in the host country.

A similar effect is observed for the presence of international staff members in the home university, which has a positive effect of the development of meta-knowledge during the study abroad. However, the presence of international staff members has no effect on multicultural personality development and even a small negative effect on the development of emotional stability. We also did not find any support for our hypothesis that studying in an international classroom with international peers at home positively affects the development of a student's multicultural personality while studying abroad. We even found a minor negative effect of interaction with international peers on the attitudinal dimension of cultural intelligence. This means that H2 is not supported by our analyses and that further research is necessary. We could, however, connect this to earlier studies claiming that interaction between international and domestic students often does not occur spontaneously and that HEIs need to find ways to actively promote social and educational encounters to avoid an international student bubble (Leask, 2009). The fact that we did not find a positive effect on the presence of international students might be related to these international student bubbles. It might indeed be the case that foreign students communicate and coexist more with each other than with national students, preventing the latter from making contact with other realities and cultures. It might be the case that students have underestimated the stressors of interactions with “strangers” abroad based on their experiences on “home turf” and, therefore, develop lower levels of emotional stability once confronted with intercultural encounters in a foreign environment. Although this interpretation should be treated with caution, it certainly deserves further research attention in the future.

A final relevant finding that we want to highlight is related to one of the control variables. Our analyses indicate that students with previous experience abroad develop themselves more strongly on all aspects of cultural intelligence and on two dimensions of the multicultural personality (cultural empathy and open-mindedness). This means that students benefit from this previous experience abroad in their own further development. Therefore, it might be useful to actively discuss these earlier experiences within ICC classes to make sure other students who did not yet have these experiences can also learn from them.

In sum, our findings suggest three specific initiatives that HEIs can take to enhance intercultural competence development during a stay abroad. The first and most effective initiative is to offer a preparatory ICC course for all students who aim to go abroad. Our findings are fairly robust in this respect and clearly underscore the benefits of such a course in students’ further development. Second, our findings indicate that recruiting international staff members can be beneficial as well, as long as their international experience is actively shared within the classroom setting. Third, it seems important that HEIs invest in an open classroom climate (Campbell, 2008) in which communication, discussion and cooperation concerning the different cultural perspectives of domestic and international students is stimulated. Our results show that the presence of international students in itself is not enough to enhance intercultural competence development; instead, intercultural experiences need to be actively shared and discussed between students and staff to enhance further learning during a subsequent study stay abroad.
5.2 Limitations

Finally, we would like to point out a few limitations of our study. First of all, although we carefully selected the four different IaH elements, the overlap between them is inevitable. For instance, it is possible that intercultural communication courses or project weeks were taught by international staff members or included student participants with different nationalities. For our analyses, this meant that we had to assess the four activities together in all models to identify their marginal effects. In a future – experimental – study, we may want to compare groups of students who each had one specific internationalisation activity in their program as a “treatment”.

Another limitation is that the dependent variables were measured with self-assessment scales. For future studies, we recommend additional measurements that go beyond self-perception, such as qualitative recording of experiences in the form of diaries and field notes. Moreover, the specific sample we studied is not necessarily a representative sample of Dutch students and programs. More specifically, it mainly included students with a stronger international focus, studying in internationally oriented institutions. We should, therefore, be careful in generalising the conclusions to a broader population. It is possible that students in this specific sample go into their international experience with a higher entry level because of the international nature of the programs they are enrolled in.

Finally, a few findings are rather difficult to interpret, such as the non-significant effects of the presence of international students. Further research is necessary to dig deeper into the differential effects of interaction with international staff members and interaction with international peers. A more qualitative approach, connecting these findings to specific case studies or supplementing them with diary studies or interviews, seems essential to sketch a more detailed picture about what it means to take part in internationalisation at-home activities. We hope that our study can inspire additional research initiatives focusing on and comparing the effectiveness of specific internationalisation at-home activities to enhance the development of international learning outcomes abroad. This is pivotal knowledge for HEIs who are strongly investing in IaH but also looking for specific recommendations to maximise the effectiveness of the mix of internationalisation activities they offer their students.

References


The role of intercultural nationalisation at home


Further reading


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